

# Max Hastings



**A** CRITICAL debate on the future of one of Britain's most enchanting wildernesses comes to a head next week: the Ministry of Defence will announce whether it is to bid to buy part of the district of Knoydart, in western Scotland, to create a live firing range.

It is easy to sympathise with the Army's problem in finding sufficient space to train with weapons in these overcrowded islands. But it will be a tragedy if the Ministry is allowed to go ahead with the purchase of 10,000 acres of Knoydart and the little community of some 60 people who live there.

A spokesman for the Army in Scotland admits that "there is a conflict of interest between what MoD wants the area for, and its present estate use. But you must recognise that we must have somewhere to carry out live firing, and there is a constant serious shortage of suitable ranges."

The problem with Knoydart is that, since it first came on the market many months ago, there has been a marked shortage of private buyers interested in paying close to £2 million for a property on which the costs of upkeep are enormous.

Various private groups of conservationists have been struggling to raise the money to save the area in its present form, and the National Trust for Scotland is to decide next week what steps, if any, it can take to help.

Yet in a situation fraught with dilemmas and doubts, the only clear certainty must be that outstanding corners of Scottish wilderness are too rare and precious today to be turned over to MoD for live firing.

The new Secretary of State for Defence should make a clear, immediate decision that his department will not bid for Knoydart.

**I** CANNOT forbear to sound a trumpet blast of triumph for the utter humiliation of the opticians' lobby by the Office of Fair Trading on Wednesday.

In their report on opticians' practices, they confirm almost everything that the critics have been saying for two years now about the scandalous nature of the restrictive practices in the sale of spectacles to the public.

No damage would be caused to anybody (except the overweight pockets of opticians), the OFT admits, by allowing adults to choose and buy spectacles freely across store counters without prescription.

The opticians' professional ban on advertising has damaged free competition and boosted prices.

Opticians' claims that the eyes of the public could suffer if they lose the monopoly of supplying spectacles is so much self-serving baloney.

The principal credit for all these revelations having been brought to the public attention belongs to Lord Rugby, who first raised the issue in the House of Lords. My other employers, the London Standard, were among the first to give the scandal a major airing.

Now we have to see whether the Minister of Health, Dr Gerard Vaughan, is a man or a jelly on this issue.

Will he act to put into practice the OFT's recommendations — and incidentally give some substance to the Government's enthusiasm for free competition?

Or will he yield to the ferocious lobbying of the opticians, whose public relations consultants have been showering me (and presumably many other interested journalists and politicians) with expensive and spurious literature intended to show that the ravens will leave the Tower, the portico of Buckingham Palace collapse and probably a nuclear holocaust break out almost immediately if the opticians' sacred monopoly is tampered with?

Dr Vaughan has a splendid choice before him: To be remembered as one of the most unmemorable Ministers in Mrs Thatcher's Administration, a mere purveyor of National Health teeth to the nation; or as the man who gave Britain cheap spectacles again. Which is it to be, Vaughan?



"But, my dear comrade, why on earth can't you believe me?"

# BEWARE THIS PHONEY PEACE OFFERING

**IN TIME** of war a "peace offensive" may make sense. But in time of peace, a peace offensive is a propaganda exercise.

There has been peace between the major Powers ever since 1945, the post-war world is just that—a post-war world.

We do not need a peace offensive to establish peace. We already have peace, based securely upon the nuclear stalemate. We enjoy a nuclear peace, a condition greatly to be preferred to war, conventional or nuclear.

This obvious truth is in danger of becoming obscured, if not obliterated.

The Soviet Union is anxious that the United States should not deploy its Cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe in response to the Soviet's SS 20 missiles.

## Preaches

To this end the men in the Kremlin, invigorated by Mr Andropov's accession to power, have engaged in a massive propaganda war, which thus far they are winning. They seek to lure the West into disarming itself.

There is something preposterous and obscene about the rituals of the world's greatest military and imperial dictatorship, the recent conquerors of Afghanistan, who hold down Poland by weight of arms and who confront the West with the greatest concentration of conventional and nuclear might that has ever been assembled, talking peace.

When Andropov preaches the virtues of non-aggression, it is like the madame of a brothel advocating chastity.

Nonetheless, millions of fools listen and respond.



**By GEORGE GALE**

Those whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad. It is crazy to believe that by refusing to defend ourselves we increase our security; that by one-sidedly giving up our arms we are the better able to defend ourselves and that by weakening ourselves we will strengthen and maintain the balance of power and deterrence upon which the peace we enjoy depends.

Yet these are the beliefs of the unilateralists and the pacifists, the green people of the West who are not so much young as childish in judgment.

Each of those who wear the CND badge might as well put on the uniform of a soldier in the Red Army for all the good his badge will do the cause of peace and the defence of freedom.

Pulling down the defences of the West will only help the East. It will make war inevitable by making Soviet victory certain.

If two men have guns, one man does not reduce his chance of being shot by the other by throwing his gun away. Quite the reverse. Nor does he pay attention to the blandishments of the other who says: "Throw away your gun, for I promise not to use mine."

Soviet military strength is real. Russian imperialism is real. Communist ideology is real. In such a world, it is as well that Western resistance to the Communist ambition of world domination is real also.

The nuclear stalemate is

the best peace we've got and it, too, is fortunately real.

The "peace offensive" is profoundly dangerous because its object is to entice the West into disarming itself without any corresponding disarmament from the Soviet Union.

It seeks to de-stabilise the balance of power to the Soviet's advantage.

The Warsaw Pact offer of non-aggression treaty, which Andropov has put forward and which Czechoslovakia is to table before the European Security conference in Madrid later this year, is a beguiling ploy.

It is not unlikely that the next Soviet step will be an offer to dissolve the Warsaw Pact in exchange for the dissolution of NATO.

## Budgets

In rejecting such offers the United States and its NATO allies must be careful not to appear as would-be aggressors, blindly refusing all Soviet approaches.

At the same time, the West cannot simply accept a non-aggression treaty, for once it did it would find it increasingly difficult to defend its defence budgets against hostile public opinion, a problem the Soviet leaders do not face.

The United States has already offered its "zero option," by which it would agree not to deploy its Cruise and Pershing missiles in

return for the Soviet Union removing its SS20 missiles.

The West has not made as much of this as it could have done, nor of the Soviet refusal to accept the option.

A further Western initiative is desirable, if only to answer the "peace offensive." The 1957 Rapacki plan for a nuclear free zone in central Europe could possibly be taken down from the shelf.

President Reagan should press ahead with the strategic arms reduction talks. Multilateral disarmament makes sense; its merits should be stressed and the benefits of the nuclear stalemate praised.

But the West cannot afford to weaken its defences by way of response to Andropov's initiatives. The deployment of the Cruise and Pershing missiles, necessary to balance the Soviet's SS20s, cannot be allowed to be halted without an equivalent Soviet withdrawal.

## Might

Unilateral nuclear disarmament makes no strategic or political sense. It does not even make moral sense, for it is to be conducted under the shade of the American nuclear umbrella.

It makes great sense for Andropov with his peace offensive to seek to dupe the West into unilateralism and nuclear disarmament. And it makes moral sense for those who seek the victory of world Communism to support each and every hypocritical peace initiative that comes out of the Kremlin, backed by the overwhelming might of the Soviet military establishment.

But for no one else does it make sense, morally or otherwise. As long as we enjoy peace, which we do, the peace offensive is a fraud and an hypocrisy.